

**BUSINESS & LABOR**

EXHIBIT NO. 7  
DATE 2-4-09  
BILL NO. SB 234

Montana Children with Autism and Montana  
Families need your help

Today...

You can help make a monumental impact  
in a child's life, in a families existence,  
in Montana, in the U.S.  
and in the world

Invest in our children, the future generation.  
If not now, when?

Business, Labor, and Economic Affairs committee;

Chairman Balyeat, Chairman Jackson and esteemed Committee Members, Thank you for your service to our great state and your time today. My name is Belinda Andreozzi DeVerniero and I am a child advocate and mother of Luciano who was diagnosed with autism on February 28, 2008. Myself, and my family, are here today to ask you for your support of SB 234 the autism insurance act. We are asking for insurance companies to cover evidence based, medically necessary treatments for our children. Insurance companies currently deny autism treatments. In six short months, although not able to utilize all services available, or participating in others, due to cost and lack of insurance covering such services, my son still progressed and went from an autism diagnosis to a PDD NOS (Pervasive Developmental Delay Not Otherwise Specified) diagnosis. These therapies do indeed work and just imagine what could happen if they were covered from early diagnosis and treatment. The thought brings joy and hope to myself and other parents as well. We pay our premiums and co pays just like you. This bill would not give us free health care, nor are we asking for that. We seek equal treatment not preferential treatment for the chronic, yet treatable, medical condition our children have. We live here, we vacation here, and we vote here, we are Montanans. We should take care of our Montana families, especially innocent children. Our son did not ask to be autistic. We did not do anything to intentionally put him into harms way. I attended my prenatal appointments, I did not smoke, drink or do drugs while carrying him. Before the clean air act (thank you for that by the way) I would not step foot into an establishment that wasn't smoke free. My husband and I did what you said to do. We went to Montana colleges, graduated, married, had children, bought a home, and purchased health insurance. We were productive members of society, paying our taxes, voting, supporting our community, devoted to our children, yet we now find ourselves on the brink of foreclosure, are now having to move in with retired Montana parents who worked for this great state, and now on state assistance (and make no mistake we are not proud nor like being dependent on the state for aid). What did we do to fail Montana or to fail our family? Nothing! My parents should not have to bear the burden of our family in their home. The state should not have to help support our family. All this is happening because the discrimination of children with autism is allowed and the full burden of treatment costs is shifted to the parents. It is time to act now, if not now then when? The UN has acknowledged the growing rate of autism and has designated April 2 as world autism awareness day. Autism has increased 10 fold in the US in the last decade. Surely we can have a law that ends discrimination of autistic children. My hope is that you are forward thinkers as our founding fathers were who liberated us and established "equality" for all. Please help us in continuing to making this state great and one of the truly "last best places" by setting a precedence and investing in our Montana children. Please support the Children of Montana by supporting this bill and the System of Care bills. Our children may have autism but it does not define who they truly are. Discipline does not cure autism; love, early intervention, and this health care bill will. Thank you for your time and you're past support of Montana children and their families.

## Autism Insurance Act SB 234

The Montana Autism Legislative Committee are asking you, their state legislators, to support this bill which contains provisions to require insurance carriers to provide coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders. These autism therapies are evidence-based, and medically necessary treatments. Laura Simonsen, Chair of the Montana Autism Legislation Committee and State Advocacy Chair for Autism Speaks points out, "Our children have a chronic, but very treatable medical condition. We pay insurance premiums just like everyone else in case "something" happens. Unfortunately, when that "something" happened to us our insurance covered almost nothing. We want insurance companies to stop discriminating against those with autism. This bill would give our kid's the same coverage for their chronic medical condition as other children receive for theirs."

With Insurance not covering these medically necessary autism therapies, families must bear the brunt of the costs, which can easily cost over \$50,000 per year. The median income in Montana being only \$38,000, means Montana children simply go without, and many families in Montana are literally going broke trying to provide some kind of care for their children. Elizabeth Emken, Autism Speaks' Vice President of Government Relations has said "'What's more difficult than knowing there's an effective treatment for your child, but you can't afford to offer it to them because it's not coverage by insurance?'"

We are also trying to ease that burden on family units themselves. The national average divorce rate is 50%, but skyrockets to 85% amongst families who have a child with a disability. This bill will alleviate some of the financial stress, isolation, and desperation families endure and replace that with hope.

The Autism Insurance Act would provide children with autism in the State of Montana with the Medically necessary healthcare coverage they need, dramatically reducing the long-term cost of their care to society. A thought shared by Darcy J. McGovern, a nurse at Billings Clinic and mother of autistic twins, "All of the therapies used to help treat Autism are essential in order for our children to survive in this world. The more independent we can make them, the less of a burden financially they will be on society." This bill would make that possible for countless of Montana children with autism.

Angela Valdez, Family Support Specialist for AWARE and mother of a child on the autism spectrum, adds "There needs to be more education on all areas of the autism spectrum - not just the profound - as the "high functioning" children tend to get missed or lost and struggle socially and with daily living skills that early intervention could have helped them learn. These are the areas that I'm really concerned with both as a professional and a mother". She also sees the need for early intervention and a flaw in the system that is in place now stating "It seems that we put a lot of effort towards "catching up"."

Charlie Briggs, who is the Assistant Vice-President of Adult and Community Services for Easter Seals-Goodwill, explains without early intervention, many of these children will become adults dependent on the government for aid, "The simple fact is you can either pay a little now or as a society, we will pay later." Michael Ganz, a professor at Harvard, conducted a study on the societal costs of caring for those with autism over their lifetimes. Without the early intervention, costs are estimated at \$3.2 million to society. Those costs drop by \$1.7 to \$2.8 million (a savings) with early intervention. It is a win-win situation for everyone, the child, the families, and the taxpayers.

### **About Autism**

Autism is a complex brain disorder that inhibits a person's ability to communicate and develop social relationships, and is often accompanied by behavioral challenges. Autism spectrum disorders are diagnosed in one in 150 children in the United States, affecting four times as many boys as girls. The prevalence of autism has increased tenfold in the last decade. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have called autism a national public health crisis whose cause and cure remain unknown.

To learn more about Autism you can visit [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)

Belinda Andreozzi DeVerniero

"We are not asking for preferential treatment for our children, just equal treatment. Montana children and families need your help, if not now then when. Please act today and show your support for Montana and the future generation. Support this bill and help save Montana families and Montana children."

Mother of Luciano diagnosed with autism at age 2

Montana Autism Legislation Committee

PR Representative

## Facts About Autism

### *Did you know...*

- 1 in 150 children is diagnosed with autism (CDC released these results in 2006 based on 2004 polls; new statistics would be placed at 1 in 98 children)
- 1 in 94 boys is on the autism spectrum
- 67 children are diagnosed per day
- A new case is diagnosed almost every 20 minutes
- More children will be diagnosed with autism this year than with AIDS, diabetes & cancer combined
- Autism is the fastest-growing serious developmental disability in the U.S.
- Autism costs the nation over \$35 billion per year, a figure expected to significantly increase in the next decade
- Autism receives less than 5% of the research funding of many less prevalent childhood diseases
- Boys are four times more likely than girls to have autism
- There is no medical detection or cure for autism

### *Incidence vs. Private Funding*

- Leukemia: Affects 1 in 25,000 / Funding: \$310 million
- Muscular Dystrophy: Affects 1 in 20,000 / Funding: \$175 million
- Pediatric AIDS: Affects 1 in 8,000 / Funding: \$394 million
- Juvenile Diabetes: Affects 1 in 500 / Funding: \$130 million
- Autism: Affects 1 in 150 / Funding: \$42 million

## About Autism

Autism is a complex neurobiological disorder that typically lasts throughout a person's lifetime. It is part of a group of disorders known as autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Today, 1 in 150 individuals is diagnosed with autism, making it more common than pediatric cancer, diabetes, and AIDS combined. It occurs in all racial, ethnic, and social groups and is four times more likely to strike boys than girls. Autism impairs a person's ability to communicate and relate to others. It is also associated with rigid routines and repetitive behaviors, such as obsessively arranging objects or following very specific routines. Symptoms can range from very mild to quite severe.

If your child is diagnosed with autism, early intervention is critical to gain maximum benefit from existing therapies. Although parents may have concerns about labeling a toddler as "autistic," the earlier the diagnosis is made, the earlier interventions can begin. Currently, there are no effective means to prevent autism, no fully effective treatments, and no cure. Research indicates, however, that early intervention in an appropriate educational setting for at least two years during the preschool years can result in significant improvements for many young children with autism spectrum disorders. As soon as autism is diagnosed, early intervention instruction should begin. Effective programs focus on developing communication, social, and cognitive skills.

Information provided and found at [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)



## General Assembly

Distr.: General  
21 January 2008Sixty-second session  
Agenda item 66 (a)

## Resolution adopted by the General Assembly

## 62/139. World Autism Awareness Day

*The General Assembly,*

*Recalling* the 2005 World Summit Outcome<sup>1</sup> and the United Nations Millennium Declaration,<sup>2</sup> as well as the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields,

*Recalling also* the Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>3</sup> and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,<sup>4</sup> according to which children with disabilities should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community, as well as the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children,

*Affirming* that ensuring and promoting the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities is critical to achieving internationally agreed development goals,

*Aware* that autism is a lifelong developmental disability that manifests itself during the first three years of life and results from a neurological disorder that affects the functioning of the brain, mostly affecting children in many countries irrespective of gender, race or socio-economic status, and characterized by impairments in social interaction, problems with verbal and non-verbal communication and restricted, repetitive behaviour, interests and activities,<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See resolution 60/1.

<sup>2</sup> See resolution 55/2.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1577, No. 27531.

<sup>4</sup> Resolution 61/106, annex I.

<sup>5</sup> See *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems*, tenth revision (subcategories F84.0 and F84.1), endorsed by the forty-third World Health Assembly in May 1990.

**Comment:** <<ODS JOB  
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*Deeply concerned* by the prevalence and high rate of autism in children in all regions of the world and the consequent development challenges to long-term health care, education, training and intervention programmes undertaken by Governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, as well as its tremendous impact on children, their families, communities and societies,

*Recalling* that early diagnosis and appropriate research and interventions are vital to the growth and development of the individual,

1. *Decides* to designate 2 April as World Autism Awareness Day, to be observed every year beginning in 2008;

2. *Invites* all Member States, relevant organizations of the United Nations system and other international organizations, as well as civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, to observe World Autism Awareness Day in an appropriate manner, in order to raise public awareness of autism;

3. *Encourages* Member States to take measures to raise awareness throughout society, including at the family level, regarding children with autism;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to bring the present resolution to the attention of all Member States and United Nations organizations.

*76th plenary meeting  
18 December 2007*